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ABSTRACT

In the past, students and teachers alike viewed reading and writing instruction as two separate entities. Reading and writing instruction was often characterized by linear and behaviorist theories and methods, with students rarely coming away from their schooling experience with confidence in and respect for their own writing. To both read and write, students needed to be able to create and receive information in terms of punctuation, spelling, grammar, and decoding, and to be adept at accessing and utilizing such cognitive processes as gathering ideas, questioning, and hypothesizing. Structural knowledge of text facilitates reading comprehension and leads students toward logical and cohesive writing. Students who write about their readings in a relevant and authentic manner become more engaged with the text and comprehend the content presented more fully. Writings calling for clarification or organization of ideas presented in text would be more beneficial than summarizing or outlining of material. In responding to text in a more comprehensive fashion (clarification or organization of ideas), readers become involved in a dialogue with the author through the text. This has strong implications for content area instruction, also for the clarification of thoughts and ideas in general. Central to the reading/writing process as it is addressed in a whole language environment is the idea of student as reader-author. The reading/writing connection can be described as reading and writing together and in concert forming a strong bond enabling the birth and nurturing of literacy. (Contains eight references.) (CR)

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Reading/Writing Connection

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The road to a clearer understanding of one's thoughts is traveled on paper. It is through an attempt to find words for ourselves in which to express related ideas that we often discover what we think.
J. Gage

Gage's suggestion that one's thoughts and ideas can be clarified through representation in print is an important one in that this notion points to the expanding scope of our understanding of the reading/writing connection. In the past, students and teachers alike viewed reading and writing instruction as two separate entities. Reading was perceived as a non-creative process which was receptive in nature (Rubin & Hansen, 1986). Readers merely decoded surface structures and inferred meaning based upon the presented vocabulary and their own personal schemas. Skills based teaching methods were prevalent and they were taught in a prescribed, sequential fashion. Reading was thought to be a singular event in that meaning was transmitted from print to the reader's mind (Rubin & Hansen, 1986). Authors and their intended messages were not a significant element in this somewhat stagnant encounter. Similarly, writing was also considered to be an element of the language arts to be taught and learned apart from all other "subjects" and with a unique body of knowledge. Writing instruction was often very labor intensive and tedious for both students and teachers. Obedience to rules and conventions was required of final products. Writing was viewed as a creative and expressive process (Rubin & Hansen, 1986) mastered only by those special artisans with a gift or a knack for this form of self expression. Writers themselves were

seen as a part of the fine arts sub-culture--eccentric and unapproachable both physically and intellectually. Their work was often considered to be irrelevant to the mainstream experience. In theory, there was no thought or forethought of communication with readers. Writing was yet another singular event with the creator of literature painting his thoughts on the canvas of the page. Upon graphic representation of those thoughts, the writer's work was finished. Thus, reading and writing instruction was often characterized by linear and behaviorist theories and methods. For these and a variety of other instructional reasons, students rarely came away from their schooling experience with confidence in and respect for their own writing ability.

Yet throughout this dichotomy of instruction, reading and writing shared some common cognitive processes (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991), vocabulary and rules. In order to both read and write, students needed to be able to create and receive information in terms of punctuation, spelling, grammar and decoding. They also needed to be adept at accessing and utilizing such cognitive processes as gathering ideas, questioning and hypothesizing (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991). Fortunately, educators began to notice that the shared elements of reading and writing were much more complicated and intense than had been previously assumed. With the upsurge of popularity of the work of the cognitive psychologists and constructivist theory (Brown & Palincsar, 1989), researchers began to modify their investigations. The literature began to be filled with work focusing on the processes of acquiring and enhancing literacy rather than upon the final product. In creating this new lens with

which to view literacy learning, researchers found that aspects of each of the language arts, particularly reading and writing, not only were common to some or all of them but they were in fact dynamically interactive and inseparable. Through these interactive elements, reading and writing together could access all of the other language arts and in fact all other learning.

As researchers continued to examine the relationship between the reading and writing processes, some exciting findings began to surface and interface with each other. Structural knowledge of text has always been known to facilitate reading comprehension but this same type of knowledge also leads students down a path toward logical and cohesive writing (Rubin & Hansen, 1986). Further, the cohesive devises used by students in their writing have often been similar to those found in texts which they have read (Cox, Shanahan, & Sulzby, 1990). Thus, students model their own writings after their readings. Student writings can be a window allowing teachers a view of the students' areas of strength and weakness. Writings can be valuable diagnostic and assessment tools to be used collaboratively with student and teacher.

It has also been shown that students who write about their readings in a relevant and authentic manner become more engaged with the text and comprehend more fully the presented content (Tierney, Soter, O'Flahavan, & McGinley, 1989). Writings calling for clarification or organization of ideas presented in text would be more beneficial than summarizing or outlining of material. In responding to text in a more comprehensive fashion (clarification or organization of ideas), readers becomes involved in a dialogue with the author

through the text. This finding has strong implications not only for content area instruction but also for the clarification of thoughts and ideas in general. Writing has a mobilizing effect upon one's thinking (Tierney, Soter, O'Flahavan, & McGinley, 1989). The clarification of thoughts through writing becomes a generative process consisting of accessing knowledge (either prior or through readings), organizing and evaluating the knowledge, then organizing and clarifying one's own thoughts and beliefs in the form of a written product. This process allows and enables students a vehicle with which to examine and develop their own ideas and beliefs. Through writing, students can play out conflicts and resolve issues which might be troubling to them. In searching for just the right word or clause, the writer chrystalizes and articulates the essence of his thought. The recursive process of writing then becomes a model for students' critical thinking process.

Central to the reading/writing process as it is addressed in a whole language environment is the idea of student as reader-author. As presented by Graves and Hansen (Rubin & Hansen, 1986), students progress through several developmental levels in their literacy learning as authors. Through relevant and authentic writing experiences, students first discover that authors (selves) have options and that authors are in control of those options. After practice, students begin to see themselves as authors. Finally, as authors, students can critically evaluate the work of all authors, addressing such issues as author intent and audience awareness. Writing is viewed as a creative and expressive process which can be

mastered and manipulated by all students. The "author" is no longer distant and unapproachable in any way because the author is self.

Many of the activities students perform in terms of authentic writing activities are done with paper and pencil. Such endeavors should never be forsaken--they are a comfortable and convenient medium. Technology, however, can provide students with some very innovating and stimulating alternatives to the traditional pencil and paper tasks. Word processing provides students with an easier platform from which to create and revise drafts. Furthermore, final products have an appearance of professional publishing. These are attractive options for students who have difficulty manipulating writing instruments or who are drawn to the technology in general. Through Interactive Text Interpreter--an environment whereby students provide written options for each other--pairs of students work together in formulating a piece of writing. Thus, author becomes reader and visa versa (Rubin & Hansen, 1986). Electronic mail is another exciting possibility for children to write and read messages from across the classroom or across the world. Technology will be a strong influence in literacy learning as we move into the twenty first century.

The understandings about the construct of the reading/writing connection are still emerging. Research has shown many positive outcomes when reading and writing are taught in an integrated fashion. Studies investigating the processes involved in this relationship rather than the product of integrated instruction will do much to enhance the body of knowledge concerning the reading/writing relationship (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991). As

research and practice present educators with data concerning this relationship, Ideas and methods will be modified and refined accordingly. For now, one could describe the reading/writing connection as reading and writing together and in concert forming a strong bond enabling the birth and nurturing of literacy. Literacy is the tool which enables access to all other understandings about ourselves and our world.

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